UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/50/571/Add.1
8 July 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Fiftieth session
Agenda item 118

JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Sharing responsibilities in peace-keeping: the United Nations and regional organizations

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to submit to the General Assembly his comments on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Sharing responsibilities in peace-keeping: the United Nations and regional organizations" (A/50/571).

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ANNEX

Comments of the Secretary-General

I. GENERAL

1. The Secretary-General considers the topic of the report to be increasingly important and one in need of thoughtful analysis and reflection. He notes that while the Inspectors have tried to address some of the key questions, they have not done so in an in-depth and comprehensive manner. In addition, their report attempts to deal with considerably more than peace-keeping and as a result loses its focus. This, together with the overly generalized treatment of issues, eventually leads to recommendations that cannot be supported by factual evidence or analytical argument.

2. The thrust of the report is that more should be done by the United Nations to strengthen the role of regional organizations in preventive diplomacy and peace operations. The Inspectors list a number of examples of regional involvement in peace-keeping and related activities, such as electoral assistance or human rights monitoring, and call for the identification and introduction of mechanisms that would give regional organizations access to funding, training and other forms of institutional support for peace operations.

3. While the importance of regional approaches to peace operations is indisputable, the report does not provide any thorough assessment of recent instances of regional involvement in peace-keeping or of the comparative advantages of regional over global approaches. This is all the more to be regretted since a detailed analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of regional peace efforts based on an evaluation of recent peace-keeping operations in which regional organizations have played a role would have helped greatly to achieve the goal of the Inspectors' study.

4. The Secretary-General notes that some of the recommendations made by the Inspectors appear to contradict the rationale for their study. The report opens with the thesis that, at a time when the capacity of the United Nations to carry out peace operations is being overstretched, regional organizations could relieve some of its burden. In contrast, the thrust of the conclusions is that the United Nations should provide regional organizations with resources to carry out roles in the peace and security field. In other words, rather than having its burden relieved by regional organizations, the United Nations is being requested to stretch its own inadequate resources even further.

5. None of the above comments should be interpreted as unwillingness on the part of the United Nations Secretariat to cooperate with or provide assistance to regional organizations. On the contrary, appropriate sharing in specific cases and deliberately on an ad hoc basis, with the United Nations providing technical advice and assistance within available resources, is much to be encouraged. The Secretary-General's primary concern is that this question should be approached on a case-by-case basis, with due regard to the specific circumstances of each situation and the strengths, weaknesses and priorities of the regional organization concerned. However, the directions and

institutionalization set out in the recommendations made in the Inspector's report would not at this stage be helpful to that process.

II. COMMENTS ON RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1 (a)

6. The recommendation that United Nations Headquarters should prepare a comprehensive strategic programme implies that it is possible and desirable to develop a general model for cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations. Experience, however, has shown that general models of cooperation are not particularly useful. This approach in fact seems to be rejected by the Inspectors themselves, who elsewhere in the report state that "a flexible and pragmatic approach is necessary to meet the particular needs of each specific situation".

Recommendation 1 (b)

7. Should the General Assembly approve the proposed unit for clearing-house functions and allocate appropriate resources for that purpose, the Secretary-General's preference would be for the unit to be physically located in the Department of Peace-keeping Operations, making use of the facilities of its Situation Centre, and to have it jointly staffed by that Department and the Department of Political Affairs, with possible involvement also of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, making it a joint unit in the service of those departments. The rationale for this is that early warning may be even more essential to preventive diplomacy and emergency relief planning than to the planning of peace-keeping operations.

Recommendation 1 (c)

8. The "mechanisms" recommended are already being instituted. A copy of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs/Department of Political Affairs/Department of Peace-keeping Operations "Framework for Cooperation" was provided to the Inspectors in the course of their preparation of the report, but is not reflected in it. The concept of "project teams" is already in place in the form of "interdepartmental groups" that have been established for a number of peace operations such as the one in Haiti. These groups work in a very effective, although informal, way.

Recommendation 1 (d)

9. The Secretary-General welcomes this recommendation. The governance programme of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) makes UNDP perhaps the most suitable body for promoting regional peace and security through the strengthening of government and civil society structures.

Recommendation 2

10. Concluding "bilateral framework agreements between the United Nations and regional organizations concerning practical aspects of peace-keeping and other

peace-related activities" would be an exercise in abstraction and fail to reflect the extraordinary complexity and specificity of the "situations" the United Nations deals with on a daily basis. In contrast, various flexible, practical, ad hoc arrangements have been concluded with a number of regional organizations in recent years to address the demands of specific situations. These pragmatic arrangements have proven far more effective and less bureaucratic than any general framework agreement would be.

11. The recommendation concerning the holding of periodic meetings between the United Nations and regional organizations does not take into account that such meetings already take place and that, with some exceptions, it cannot be considered that they are successful. Specific meetings for specific purposes of cooperation, on a pragmatic and flexible basis, should certainly continue but it would not seem warranted at this stage to institutionalize further meetings of a general nature.

Recommendation 3

12. It should be noted that the special representatives of the Secretary-General maintain, as a matter of course, effective liaison with regional organizations participating in specific peace-keeping operations. However, subordinating regional organizations to overall coordination by the special representative is a matter of considerable legal complexity. It is not clear by which legislative (or other) authority such responsibility could be given.

Recommendation 4

13. The Secretary-General would like to note that the United Nations already contributes training and advisory services to regional organizations on a case-by-case basis. Whenever so requested and subject to availability of qualified staff, it shares relevant information and provides resource persons with appropriate expertise to lecture and participate in workshops. The Secretary-General stands ready to consider specific requests for use of existing United Nations training facilities on a reimbursable basis, their capacity permitting.

Recommendation 5

14. The recommendations related to financing do not seem to be realistic. There is no evidence that generalized trust funds of the type recommended would elicit much support. For the most part, donors do not respond to appeals for generic funds for non-specific purposes.

15. In addition, the Secretariat finds that exercising its fiduciary responsibilities in the administration of trust funds related to United Nations peace-keeping activities is a tremendously complex exercise. It believes that the complexity of its administering trust funds established for the benefit of regional organizations engaged in peace-keeping activities would be even greater. This would make it preferable to have any such trust funds established and administered by the regional organizations themselves.

III. SPECIFIC COMMENTS

Role and capacity of regional organizations (paras. 2 and 3)

16. The Inspectors refer to the concept, as outlined in the Charter, that regional organizations should be the first "port of call" for the prevention and pacific settlement of local disputes (para. 3) and indicate that the objective of the report "is to contribute to the current efforts to increase the involvement of regional organizations in collective security, in the hope that this would ease the burden of the United Nations" (para. 2).

17. At the same time, in their executive summary (p. v), the Inspectors state that "it is not within the mandate of the Joint Inspection Unit to evaluate the capacity of regional organizations to carry out their tasks effectively in this field" (i.e. to plan, launch, manage and provide administrative and logistic support to field operations). While this constraint on the mandate of the Inspectors is recognized, in fact, in the present circumstances it is precisely this that would have been of more value in order to assess more accurately the scale of the problem instead of proceeding directly to suggesting solutions.

Regional organizations: mechanisms and current activities in peace-keeping (paras. 19-54)

18. It should be recalled that there are very significant differences between peace-keeping and other peace-related activities. While the title of the report refers only to peace-keeping, its text casts a much wider net. In its paragraph 20, the report notes 16 regional organizations, but does not clearly differentiate between their capabilities for peace-keeping and their capacities for wider peace-related activities. Contrary to the general thrust of the text, most of the organizations referred to lack a real capacity for peace-keeping.

19. Much of the rest of the text refers to activities that, although often associated with United Nations peace-keeping operations, are not peace-keeping themselves, for example, sanctions enforcement, sanctions assistance, human rights/political process monitoring, electoral assistance and humanitarian assistance.

20. Several of the pitfalls of trying to carry out joint operations are mentioned, but often the text drifts into referring to cooperation in activities other than peace-keeping itself. While there can be much merit in such cooperation, where practicable, it is not what the title of the report purports to be about.

21. By the time the reader reaches paragraph 55, the subject under study has indeed widened to embrace "the sharing of responsibilities in the maintenance of peace and security between the United Nations and regional organizations".

22. Paragraph 46 of the report states that "the use of military personnel in humanitarian relief operations has proved to be advantageous to the success of these operations". It is not specified what particular instances of "success" led to this conclusion. Neither is it clear whether the reference is made in

relation to the use of military assets in a support/logistics capacity or in the provision of security.

Sharing responsibilities in peace-keeping and other peace-related activities (paras. 55-83)

23. Regarding paragraph 63 of the report, the Secretary-General wishes to point out that there exists ongoing work to improve the coordination of the planning and implementation of activities of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, Department of Peace-keeping Operations and Department of Political Affairs in complex operations. However, such coordination, while it involves the establishment of interdepartmental working groups to exchange information and cooperation, does not include the establishment of a single joint project team. The allied proposal that there should be a single clearing-house function on United Nations relations with regional organizations in the field of peace and security does not seem to take into account the wide disparities between the individual circumstances of each situation and the different natures and capabilities of the regional organizations themselves. The Secretariat's preference goes to flexible, effective arrangements both at the senior and working levels, rather than to formal organizational structures that might generate more bureaucracy than efficiency.

24. It should be pointed out that the potential for command and control difficulties in joint peace-keeping operations is strong and that those difficulties cannot be easily resolved through inter-Secretariat or other technical mechanisms. It is inevitable that different organizations, having different governing bodies, will have somewhat different priorities. Ensuring that organizations cooperating in a joint operation receive consistent political direction from their respective policy organs will therefore always be a challenge.

25. As far as the preparedness of the United Nations to increase cooperation with regional organizations is concerned, the issue is not only one of willingness but also one of resources. The limited resources at the United Nations disposal have to be put to the most effective use. Sometimes there can be much to be gained from encouraging regional organizations to share the burden, but if those organizations were to gain such capabilities at United Nations expense, then the result would often be little appreciable gain and scarce United Nations resources being unavailable for use as originally intended. The cooperation therefore has to be shaped to the particular needs and circumstances of each case.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

26. On 22 February 1995, the Security Council approved its response to the Secretary-General's Supplement to Agenda for Peace, in which it states: 1/

> "The Security Council reaffirms the importance it attaches to the role that regional organizations and arrangements can play in helping to maintain international peace and security. It underlines the need for effective coordination between their efforts and those of the United

Nations in accordance with Chapter VIII of the Charter. It recognizes that the responsibilities and capacities of different regional organizations and arrangements vary, as well as the readiness and competence of regional organizations and arrangements, as reflected in their charters and other relevant documents, to participate in efforts to maintain international peace and security. It welcomes the Secretary-General's willingness to assist regional organizations and arrangements as appropriate in developing a capacity for preventive action, peacemaking and, where appropriate, peace-keeping. It draws particular attention in this regard to the needs of Africa. It encourages the Secretary-General and Member States to continue to consider ways and means of improving practical cooperation and coordination between the United Nations and regional organizations and arrangements in these areas. The Council encourages the Secretary-General to continue the practice of meetings on cooperation between the United Nations and regional and other organizations."

27. This general policy directive of the Security Council will guide the Secretary-General and the Secretariat in achieving the goal of developing more effective and efficient cooperation with regional organizations. However, the challenges that undoubtedly exist cannot be met by overarching, macro-solutions such as one "comprehensive strategic programme" or by calling for generalized trust funds to be established. These and other recommendations found in the report, if adopted, would not necessarily lead to worthwhile improvements and indeed might have the potential of complicating the already difficult task faced by the United Nations in managing cooperation with external actors.

Notes

1/ S/PRST/1995/9, eleventh paragraph of the statement.